

VZCZCXR07005
PP RUEHBZ RUEHDU RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLU #0785/01 3630955
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 290955Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY LUANDA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5869
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LUANDA 000785

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/28/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM AO

SUBJECT: ANGOLA'S OPPOSITION: WEAK PILLAR IN THE DEMOCRATIC EDIFICE

REF: A. LUANDA 750

¶B. LUANDA 751 AND PREVIOUS

(U) Classified by CDA Jeff Hawkins, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. While Angola's political opposition faces many institutional obstacles, considerable internal weaknesses also prevent it from playing fully its role in a democratic system. Whereas the ruling MPLA, albeit with all the advantages of decades of incumbency, is well organized, united, and nationally ubiquitous, the opposition is none of these things. The opposition parties have weak, and increasingly fractured, leadership. The parties have failed to identify political agendas that resonate with the Angolan people. The opposition parties have largely remained regional, rather than national, in scope, and even in traditional strongholds organization appears weak. Finally, these parties have failed to find a voice or establish a means of communication with the Angolan electorate. The opposition can rightfully point to many advantages the MPLA enjoys; nevertheless, these parties must also put their own houses in order if the democratization process in Angola is to move forward. End Summary.

¶12. (C) The MPLA's recent congress put the power, prestige, and organization of the ruling party on display for the Angolan people. Thousands of delegates from every corner of the country came together in an impressive showing of unity and support for the party president. The party, in power since independence, has vast resources and truly national reach. An MPLA flag flies over just about every village in the country.

¶13. (C) This stands in stark contrast to the opposition. The parties that make up Angola's parliamentary opposition - UNITA, PRS, FNLA, and Nova Democracia - are relatively minor actors on the political scene. UNITA and FNLA, given their history as members of the triumvirate of resistance movements to the Portuguese, are household names. UNITA represented a significant force during the long years of the civil war, and continues to be the most important opposition party. But these parties no longer have any role in the executive branch, play a secondary role in parliament, and often seem unable to shape in any meaningful way the political processes of the country.

¶14. (C) The opposition would argue that there are powerful institutional obstacles to their development, and they have a point. The MPLA holds Cidade Alta (the Angolan White House) and has huge majority in the parliament. The state controls much of the media and has set up limits to the independent media, particularly radio, which tends to keep opposition figures and issues out of the news. The government and party have a number of carrots and sticks to use on potential opponents. Even Angola's electoral law seems to conspire against the opposition. In 2009, the Constitutional Court dissolved many minor parties - a few of which were led by leaders with some measure of local notoriety - as parties that won less than 0.5% in the 2008 parliamentary elections were required by law to disband.

¶ 15. (C) However, the opposition is responsible, at least in part, for its own weakness. In particular, we have identified four major failings.

Weak, Fractured Leadership

¶ 16. (C) The opposition does not have strong leadership, and there are significant internal divisions in nearly all of them. For the opposition, the days of charismatic independence movement leaders is over. UNITA head Isaias Samakuva is an articulate Embassy interlocutor with excellent English, but he has neither the stature nor the presence of former UNITA supremo Jonas Savimbi, killed in 2002. Samakuva did not provide effective leadership in the 2008 elections and has failed to re-energize his party since its crushing electoral defeat. Weekly independent "Seminario Angolense" listed Samakuva in its latest edition as one of the failures of 2009. For the moment, Samakuva appears to have control over UNITA, but there may be challengers in the wings, particularly Abel Chivukuvuku. As for the FNLA, headed from its creation until 2007 by independence leader Holden Roberto, the party is in meltdown. In a drawn out battle for party leadership, the courts recently decided in favor of Lucas Ngonda, a decision liable to create a schism with former president Ngola Kubango's supporters. PRS leader Eduardo Kuangana is a low-key figure with a modest regional (read ethnic) base whose party has also recently witnessed a messy parting of the ways between senior leadership. Nova Democracia head Quintino de Moreira - considered by some to

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be a shill for the MPLA - is a political non-entity largely unknown before the 2008 elections.

Failure to Articulate a Meaningful Agenda

¶ 17. (C) The opposition has not found an issue set that speaks to the Angolan people. To the extend that there exists some groundswell of discontent with the decades of MPLA rule and Angola's poor social indicators, the opposition has failed to tap into it. In recent months, UNITA has focused on Dos Santos's failure to hold 2009 presidential elections and on the constitutional process. The elections issue has not gained much traction - perhaps because at least one IRI poll last year gave a much higher popular favorability rating to Dos Santos than to Samakuva or any other opposition figure - and the constitutional debate may be too complicated and arcane to appeal to a wide cross-section of voters. On occasion, UNITA reps speak out publicly regarding the failures of MPLA government, as UNITA's parliamentary whip did in the October opening session of the National Assembly, but without offering any credible alternative program. PRS is a strong proponent of a federal system, but in a country visibly working to knit itself together after years of civil war this has only limited, regional appeal. FNLA seems focused on internal problems, and Nova Democracia tows the MPLA line.

Lack of National Representation

¶ 18. (C) The MPLA is the only truly national party in Angola. While UNITA maintains offices in many parts of the country, its presence in a number of provinces is beginning to atrophy; the other parties are not present across Angola. The 2008 election results suggest none of the opposition parties have been able to generate even modest support nationwide and that in their traditional strongholds opposition parties have lost ground. During the elections, UNITA's best showing was in the southern and western

provinces that essentially made up its power base during the war (Huambo, Bie, Benguela, Cuando Cubango, Moxico), but generally these were only in the 12-18 percent range. UNITA failed to score even in the low single digits in many other provinces. The one surprise score in the 2008 elections - UNITA's 31% showing in Cabinda - is probably a result of a protest vote by Cabindans with separatist sympathies, not a reflection of UNITA's organization in the province. The PRS did well only in its base in the Lundas, and the FNLA only in its northern stronghold of Zaire. On our travels up-country, we generally try to meet with representatives of the major political parties; we rarely, if ever, encounter dynamic, thoughtful opposition leaders in the provinces. The opposition's talent and political savvy, such as it is, is Luanda-based.

Inability to Reach the Electorate

¶9. (C) The opposition has difficulty communicating with voters. Limits on independent media certainly make this challenging. UNITA supporters do control Luanda-based Radio Despertar, although it has periodically been a target of government restrictions. A number of weekly newspapers, admittedly with circulations in the low thousands, also cover opposition positions, as does the influential Luanda-based Radio Ecclesia. The opposition, however, has largely failed to take advantage of these limited outlets, and there is no consistent, targeted message to the audiences available. For a variety of reasons - some to do with government controls and others to do with internal organizational problems - the opposition rarely resorts to more popular means of communication, like mass meetings or rallies, door-to-door campaigning, or distribution of leaflets. Samakuva told DCM this fall that UNITA had considered demonstrations on the constitutional issue but had ultimately decided against doing so, "in the interests of public security." UNITA presumably has enough support in some Luanda neighborhoods to gather a good crowd, but the party's decision to avoid doing so may suggest fears about low turnout as much as concerns about possible violence.

¶10. (C) Comment. For democracy to take firm root in a post-conflict country like Angola, a strong, vibrant, self-assured opposition is vital. There are many external reasons why Angola's opposition has yet to fully assume this role, but many of its failures are internal. Longer term, therefore, political development in Angola may depend as much on democratization within the MPLA as it does on further

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development of Angola's weak opposition parties. End
Comment.
HAWKINS